MDM Discourse Workshop Notes

1. Discursive Psychology. Validation, reliability and quality in discourse analysis

Discursive Psychology

(Also referred to as the Discursive Action Model)

Represented and introduced by Potter & Wetherell's (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology.* Further developed, and label provided, by Edwards & Potter (1992) *Discursive Psychology*

Origins of discursive psychology
Sociological studies of science (e.g. Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984)
Ethnomethodology/Conversation analysis
Speech Act theory (e.g. John Austin, 1975 – two categories of language descriptive and utterances that perform actions)

Orientations of discursive psychology
1. Treats discourse as action
2. Prioritizes stake
3. Emphasizes the fluidity and variability of discourse

Interpretative repertoires

The major analytic category introduced by DP. An interpretative repertoire is a particular coherent way of talking about or constructing a subject, object or activity: 'a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize actions and events' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 138).

Identifying an interpretative repertoire will have at least as much to do with the analyst's familiarity with the subject-area of a particular topic than her knowledge of the abstract skills of analysis itself.

But *see also Potter's (2004) more recent critique of the notion of repertoires*: too 'macro' – need to look at situatedness of construction rather than 'pre-existing' structures.

Validity, reliability and quality in discourse analysis

Validation

All research methods involve interpretation and hence a subjective factor at some level.

Potter & Wetherell (1987) and Potter (2004) specify a number of validation criteria:

(1) Coherence

Whether your analysis shows how the text as a whole produces effects and functions. If there are loose ends, features of the material that do not fit the explanation you are offering, the reader is less likely to regard the analysis as complete and trustworthy.

Finding exceptions
If there are clearly certain features of exceptions which mark them off from the previous pattern and which thereby explain their status as exceptions, the explanatory status of our scheme is confirmed. If, on the other hand, the exceptions have no special features which plausibly explain their difference from our scheme, then the exclusive nature of the scheme must be questioned.

(2) Participants' orientation.
We are interested in participants' orientations insofar as we claim that different repertoires *are* different and have different consequences for speakers.

(3) Creating new problems
The existence of new problems arising for speakers using the discursive resources in the way we have suggested provided further evidence in support of our claims about their nature and function. E.g. The 'truth will out' device in Gilbert & Mulkay (1984)

(4) Fruitfulness
This relates to a general criterion of validity for scientific explanations and theories: their ability to generate fresh solutions to other problems in a field of research.

(5) Plausibility
A basic and overarching criterion for validity in Discourse Analysis is that of the *plausibility* of the claims you make. Plausibility is a question of whether the particular claims you make seem to make sense of the material. Do they work?

The possibility of discussion - the testing of the plausibility of your analytic claims - can take place at two points.

(1) *discuss* your analysis, before you write it up, with others. Getting others' responses to your ideas is a way of testing their plausibility. One way to do this is through an informal chat with friends or others familiar with the aims of discourse analysis.

(2) the written presentation itself. An advantage of discourse analysis is that, unlike for other methods, both our interpretations and our data are laid bare in the write-up.

(6) Reliability

Reliability is a question of whether, if the same material is examined twice or more, you get the same answer. Would different researchers come up with the same analysis on the same material?

There is undoubtedly an element of subjectivity involved in DA, in that people's different personal histories and scholarship will affect how they read the text and what they find. E.g. Billig (1988)

However, in identifying for example a repertoire that others haven't, this does not mean that you are denying that other repertoires are present in the text.

Quality in discourse analysis: Some analytic shortcomings

Antaki, Billig, Edwards & Potter (2002)

- **Under analysis through summary**
- **Under-analysis through over-quotation or isolated quotation**
- **Circular discovery of (a) discourses and (b) mental constructs**
- **Under-analysis through false survey**

2. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis.

Comparison of versions of Discourse Analysis.

Foucauldian discourse analysis

Introduced into psychology through the journal *Ideology & Consciousness* (1970s) and later the book *Changing the Subject* (Henriques et al., 1984). 'Popularized' within social psychology by Ian Parker (e.g., *Discourse Dynamics*, 1992).

Origins of Foucauldian discourse analysis
- Foucault and post-structuralism

Orientations of Foucauldian discourse analysis
- Concerned with the availability of discourse resources

Parker's (1992) criteria for distinguishing discourses

1. *A discourse is realised in texts*
   We begin with texts in or on which we 'find' discourses. We begin to identify discourses, or hypothesise about what discourses a particular text may contain, perhaps by **free associating** about the connotations of words (or other features) of the text, preferably with others.
2. *A discourse is about objects*
   We ask what objects the discourse refers to, and we describe those objects. We then treat the discourse of these objects as itself an object.
3. *A discourse contains subjects*
   A discourse makes available a space for particular types of self to step in; it addresses us in a particular way.
4. *A discourse is a coherent system of meanings*
   We employ culturally-available understandings as to what constitutes a coherent pattern or topic. The next step would therefore be that of mapping out the world or ontology the discourse presents or implies.

5. *A discourse relates to other discourses*
   In any text, it is likely that you may be able to identify more than one discourse. The two discourses may be in dialogue, set as opposites or muddled together. You should attempt to set possible contrasting discourses against each other and look at the way they construct different objects or the same objects in different ways.
6. *A discourse reflects on its own way of speaking*
   Sometimes you will find the speaker in a text being reflexive about the discourse. An example would be when the speaker says 'For want of a better word..'. Sometimes this goes as far as the speaker denying the moral implications of the world-view being expressed, thereby reflecting upon it **as** a discourse.
7. *A discourse is historically located*
   Discourses are located in time and history. Methodologically, a further step would therefore be to look at how and where the discourse emerged.

   Thus

8. *Discourses support (or are linked to) institutions*
   Discourses are seen not as free-floating but as bound up with existing institutional structures (e.g., the state, the medical profession, business etc.)

9. *Discourses reproduce power-relations*
   Dominant discourses privilege particular versions of social reality and hence certain ways of being over others. Analytically, you should suggest which categories of person gain and lose from the employment of the discourse, and hence suggest who would want to promote and who to resist the use of the discourse.

10. *Discourses have ideological effects*
    Analytically, Parker suggests we show how discourses connect with other discourses which justify oppression, and also how these discourses facilitate the telling by dominant groups of the narratives which use the past to justify the present.

Contrast between the versions of discourse analysis:

The two versions of DA address different sorts of research questions:

- managing interaction *versus* describing and critiquing the discursive worlds people inhabit.

Metatheory

<u>Agency</u>

- DP: emphasis on discourse as a tool manipulated by speakers who have a stake in the conversation (e.g. disclaiming blame). Hence the speaker is - at least implicitly - an active agent
- FDA: emphasis on discourse as constructing subjects - hence emphasis on the power of discourse to make available certain meanings and experiences; discourse constrains as well as enables

<u>Experience</u>

- DP: questions the value of 'experience' as an analytic category; conceptualizes 'experience' (along with 'subjectivity' and 'identity') only as

discursive resources - localized discursive formations which are continually re-negotiated as speakers encounter different rhetorical contexts.

- FDA: attempts to **theorize** 'experience' and 'subjectivity' in-themselves through showing how certain discourses make certain kinds of experience possible or non-possible; thus stresses that discursive constructions make available certain ways of being.

Analysis: 'Discourse' versus 'interpretative repertoire'

In DP, people are said to draw upon and use *interpretative repertoires* to meet various interpersonal goals.
But the emphasis in FDA is not on people's agency in relation to discourses, but rather the power of discourses to define people.
DP is inherently **linguistic**: interpretative repertoires are identified through figures of speech, tropes, clichés and so on. *Discourses*, however, are said to exist in **any** medium to which we can give an interpretative gloss.

Possible implications of the different approaches

- The champions of DP (Potter) are explicit that DP is 'quintessentially' academic.
- This seems to be embodied in the notions of relativism and reflexivity which are so important within this strand
- Proponents of FDA often wanted to criticise aspects of the world as part of the process of creating change.
- DP allows us to **describe** for example how definitions of health and illness might be negotiated.
- FDA suggests the possibility, at least, of introducing alternative or counter-discourses to the dominant, disempowering ones.
- The alternatives subvert the dominant discourses and institutions by offering different subjectivities or ways of experiencing: ways that are better for the participants involved.

Choosing your version of DA…data-set and research questions
If your data is a soundtrack recording of interaction and your question is concerned with how the participants manage this interaction, how it is organized, how particular interpersonal goals are achieved, then you ought to use Discursive Psychology.

Towards an eclectic approach

Rationale for eclecticism
Discourse constructs subjects, but to be a subject is to be an actor, albeit not in conditions of our individual choosing.
Wetherell (1998): we need to examine both the **situated and shifting nature of discursive construction**s, and the **wider social and institutional frameworks** (of meaning, social relations etc.) within which they are produced.
While a focus on discursive practice helps us to understand **how** speakers construct and negotiate meaning, a focus on discursive resources helps us to answer questions about **why** speakers draw on certain repertoires and not others.

3. Critical Discourse Analysis

Social constructionism reminds us that there is always more than one version of events, and that experiences can be read in different ways.

Social constructionism therefore opens up possibilities for *change* because it emphasises our active participation in the construction of our world(s).

CDA: an explicit recognition of our place as *subjects within social relations of power and dominance* (van Dijk, 1993). That is, we are subjects who have an interest in challenging such relations, and who are therefore taking sides.

In terms of research practice and analysis, we do this through *exposing the way relations of power and dominance are discursively sustained*.

In particular, by unravelling and critiquing the constructed nature of versions of social relations, we create a *space for alternative (liberatory) ways* of talking, thinking and experiencing (Willig, 1999, p. 2).